

**Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Draft Federal Public Involvement Procedures**

Slated for Revision: July 2003

Guiding Principles

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission's public involvement procedures are built on the following guiding principles:

- *Public participation is a dynamic activity that requires teamwork and commitment at all levels of the MTC organization.*
- *One size does not fit all—effective public participation strategies must be tailored to fit the audience and the issue.*
- *Citizen advisory committees can be used to hear and learn from many voices in the Bay Area.*
- *Engaging the interested citizen in 'regional' transportation issues is challenging, but possible.*
- *Effective public outreach and involvement requires relationship building.*

These procedures are not a static document, but an on-going strategy that will be periodically reviewed and updated based on established objectives, success, or challenges in meeting those objectives, and the changing circumstances of the Commission and the transportation community it serves.

Introduction

The overall objective of MTC's public involvement process is to provide *opportunities to the public for early and continuing involvement in critical transportation projects, plans and decisions, and full public access to key decisions*. Engaging the public early and often in the decision-making process is critical to the success of any transportation plan or program, and is required by numerous state and federal laws, as well as by the Commission's own internal procedures.

Statutory Requirements

The landmark federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, which was reauthorized in 1998 as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA21), underscores the need for

public involvement, calling on metropolitan planning organizations such as MTC to “provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment” on transportation plans and programs.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that transportation planning and programming be non-discriminatory on the basis of race, color, national origin or disability. The federal statute was further clarified and supplemented by the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 and a series of federal statutes enacted in the 1990’s relating to the concept of environmental justice. The fundamental principles of environmental justice include:

- 1. Avoiding, minimizing or mitigating disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations;*
- 2. Ensuring full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and*
- 3. Preventing the denial, reduction or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority populations and low-income communities*

Elements of MTC’s Public Involvement Program:

MTC is committed to a public involvement process that is proactive and provides comprehensive information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and opportunities for continuing involvement. MTC provides many methods to fulfill this commitment, including the following elements:

MTC Web Site: www.mtc.ca.gov

MTC’s Web site is targeted to a wide range of audiences ranging from transit riders seeking bus schedules to transportation professionals, elected officials and news media seeking information on particular programs, projects and public meetings.

Updated daily, the site provides information about MTC’s projects and programs, the agency’s structure and governing body and upcoming public meetings and workshops. It contains the names, email addresses and phone numbers for staff and Commission members, all of MTC’s current planning documents, publications located in the MTC-Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) Library, data from the 2000 census as well as detailed facts about the region’s travel patterns. The site also posts agendas and packets as well as audiocasts, making it possible for interested parties to “tune in” at their convenience to all Commission and standing committee meetings held in the MetroCenter’s Lawrence D. Dahms Auditorium.

MTC Commission and committee meetings:

MTC encourages interested residents to attend MTC Commission and Committee meetings to express their views. Items on the Commission agenda usually come in the form of recommendations from MTC standing committees. Much of the nitty-gritty work of MTC is done at the committee level, thus the public is encouraged to participate at this stage. All MTC meetings are open to the public.

Agendas and meeting packets for all of MTC's standing committees, the Commission and Advisory Committees are posted on the Web site approximately one week prior to each meeting. In addition, MTC's Public Information Office publishes a monthly tentative meeting schedule, and sends copies of this, as well as specific meeting agendas, to interested members of the public.

MTC's 19-member policy board meets the fourth Wednesday of each month. The Commission is comprised of fourteen members appointed by local elected officials two members representing regional agencies (the Association of Bay Area Governments and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission), plus three non-voting members from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the state's Business, Transportation and Housing Agency.

MTC standing committees are listed below:

Administration – oversees the operation and management of the Commission staff, approves consultant contracts and sets agency financial policies (meets the second Wednesday of each month).

Bay Area Toll Authority Oversight – oversees the work of the Bay Area Toll Authority, which serves as fiscal watchdog for the revenue generated by the region's seven state-owned bridges as well as the multi-billion dollar program to update and expand the bridges (meets the second Wednesday of each month).

Programming and Allocations – reviews transportation projects as they become ready for implementation for consistency with regional transportation priorities and air quality laws, then recommends to the full MTC board how various regional, state and federal funds should be allotted to specific projects around the region (meets the second Wednesday of each month).

Legislation – recommends MTC legislative policy, represents the Commission in the legislative process, and oversees the Commission's public information and citizen participation programs (meets the second Friday of each month).

Planning and Operations – recommends revisions to the Regional Transportation Plan – MTC's evolving 20-year blueprint for Bay Area transportation; recommends overall priorities for funding the regional transportation system, recommends programming of funds for projects in the State Transportation Improvement Program and the federal Transportation Improvement Program; reviews planning studies along specific travel corridors (meets the second Friday of each month).

Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways Operations – directs the work of motorist-aid programs administered by the MTC Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways, including the region's call box and Freeway Service Patrol network (meets the second Friday of each month).

Written materials that accompany agenda items, often available on the Web, are also made available to the public at committee meetings. In addition, the materials are available from the MTC/ABAG Library or from the MTC Public Information Office. Each of MTC's standing committees are audiocast via MTC's Web site. All Commission public meetings, workshops, forums, etc. are held in locations that are accessible to persons with disabilities. Assistive listening devices or other auxiliary aids are available upon request at all MTC meetings. Sign-language interpreters for persons with hearing impairments and readers for persons with visual impairments will be provided if requested through MTC Public Information at least three working days (72 hours) prior to the meeting (five or more days' notice is preferred).

Notices of these meetings, complete with the date, time, location and preliminary agenda, are posted on MTC's website at least 72 hours prior to each meeting and mailed out at least one week prior to the date of the meeting. Final agendas are posted 72 business hours in advance of the meeting time in the MTC/ABAG Library, located in the Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter (the building that houses the MTC offices) at 101 Eighth Street in Oakland. Agendas and meeting notices are available from the MTC Public Information Office (telephone 510/464-7787).

MTC Public Hearings, Workshops and Forums

Public hearings on specific issues may be held independently or at the same time as Commission or committee meetings. Notice of these public hearings are placed in the legal section of at least nine major newspapers in the MTC region, three of which are newspapers circulated in minority

communities of the Bay Area. Documents containing the proposals to be considered at MTC public hearings are mailed to major libraries throughout the MTC region prior to public hearings, and are made available to interested citizens upon request. In addition, these documents are placed on file in the MTC/ABAG Library, *located in the Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter (the building that houses the MTC offices) at 101 Eighth Street in Oakland*. The MTC Public Information Office can provide citizens with the names and addresses of libraries that received the public hearing documents.

MTC also conducts workshops, community forums, conferences and other events to keep the public informed and involved in various transportation projects *and plans and to elicit feedback from the public and MTC's partners*. MTC holds meetings throughout the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area to solicit comments on major plans and programs, such as the *long-range Regional Transportation Plan*. Meetings are located and scheduled to maximize public participation (including evening meetings). *MTC will attempt to provide accurate, high-quality and culturally sensitive translations/interpreters to more actively involve bilingual and multilingual communities in its public comment process when appropriate. Alternative language interpreters must be requested at least three working days (72 hours) prior to the meeting (five or more days' notice is preferred).*

MTC Advisory Groups

MTC has established a number of citizen advisory groups to foster ongoing public awareness of and involvement in transportation decision-making, especially by those groups who have been traditionally underserved by transportation systems. The advisory groups are consulted during the development of MTC policies and strategies, and their recommendations on various issues are reported to the Commission. They also address commissioners directly at MTC committee and Commission meetings. All advisory committee meetings are open to the public. *Agendas are posted on the Web* and citizens can request to be placed upon the mailing list to receive them. Currently advisory groups include:

- MTC Advisory Council – serves as a citizen advisory group to the Commission. The Advisory Council — composed of 23 members from *a number of* interest categories — ensures commissioners receive a diverse spectrum of input. The Advisory Council, whose members are appointed to two-year terms, includes the following interest categories: *academia, architecture, business, community, engineering, environmental, labor, public safety, the news media as well as* user categories: *freight, automobile, transit and non-motorized transportation*. Additionally, *two members* are drawn from

existing advisory groups to MTC: the Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committee and the Minority Citizens Advisory Council.

- Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committee – set up to advise MTC regarding issues of concern to *older adults* and to persons with disabilities, including access to transportation services and implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. *The 20-member panel includes representative from the nine Bay Area counties. Members include one elderly and one disabled advisor from each of the nine counties, selected by the Commissioner(s) representing each county. Two additional advisors, either elderly or disabled, are selected from the region at large by the Commissioners representing the Association of Bay Area Governments and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission.*
- Minority Citizens Advisory Committee – created to ensure that the views and needs of minority communities are adequately reflected in MTC policies. The Commission appoints, *for two-year terms*, members from the nine Bay Area counties to represent the region's major ethnic minority groups: African American, Asian American, Hispanic and Native American. *In addition, two members represent the views of low-income communities.* The Minority Citizens Advisory Committee reviews MTC's work program and projects. *This Committee provides formal input on decisions and actions pending before the Commission, actively and independently researches new initiatives that the committee believes might be relevant to the Commission and assists the Commission in the formulation and review of the MTC Affirmative Action Plan goals and timetables. The Committee develops procedures for identifying, contacting and interacting with the various underserved (ethnic) communities in the region and improves the coverage of transportation issues in ethnic media.*

In addition to the current panels listed above, MTC has formed a number of technical advisory committees, and serves on other multi-agency advisory committees.

MTC's Public Information Program

MTC's Public Information staff provides the following materials and services:

- Meeting agendas, meeting notices and materials that accompany agenda items for meetings of the Commission and its committees and advisory panels.
- *Public Information staff also works with interested organizations to arrange for MTC staff and commissioners to make presentations to community groups.*

- *Public Information Officers will respond to questions by telephone, U.S. mail or email from the public about MTC and the media.*
- *MTC also issues news releases on transportation and Commission actions of interest to the public.*

MTC Publications

The Public Information Office publishes *a variety of materials to inform the public about MTC's work, issues relating to Bay Area transportation and guides for transit users. The publications include:*

- *MTC's monthly newsletter, Transactions, offering news about MTC's activities, along with general transportation news for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. Between 13,000 and 15,000 copies are circulated free of charge to interested citizens, the news media, public officials, legislators, transit staff, national transportation groups, environmental groups, business groups and libraries.*
- *Citizens Guide to MTC, (updated July 2002) serving as a primer on MTC's roles and responsibilities for the region's interested citizens and local policy-makers, and providing basic information on the Bay Area's transportation network.*
- *Moving Costs: A Transportation Funding Guide, (updated Spring 2000) answering basic questions about transportation finance, and providing information for citizens who want to be involved in transportation funding decisions.*
- *MTC's Annual Report, providing information about MTC allocations and expenditures.*

MTC also publishes *guides for transit riders and other materials to help Bay Area residents learn more about transportation. These publications include working papers, technical memoranda, reports based on data from the U.S. Census and other sources that describe regional travel characteristics and travel forecasts, brochures and studies. They are available to the public through the MTC/ABAG Library, located at MTC offices. Most can be found on MTC's Web site. A charge may be levied to recover the cost of producing and (if applicable) mailing the publication.*

All of the Library's publications are listed on MTC's Web site. They can be ordered by phone (510/464-7836), email or by completing the online form. Upon request, MTC publications are transferred to a format that is accessible to persons with disabilities.

MTC's Electronic Outreach

The commitment to using technology to extend public outreach continues with MTC-ABAG Library staff posting on MTC's Web site the headlines of transportation and related stories from nine Bay Area daily newspapers — San Francisco Chronicle, San Jose Mercury, Oakland Tribune, Contra Costa Times, San Mateo County Times, Marin Independent Journal, Press Democrat (Santa Rosa), Napa Valley Register, and the Daily Republic (Fairfield). Stories are also posted from the Sacramento Bee, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post and weekly Bay Area business journals. Readers can view the headlines each morning on MTC's website or subscribe to the service via email.

Other Public Participation Efforts

MTC works closely with the Bay Area Partnership that consists of 32 agencies responsible for moving people and goods in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as for protecting the region's environmental quality. The Partnership includes county congestion management agencies (CMAs), transportation authorities and transit districts. The Commission works closely with these public agencies to ensure that citizens are informed of and involved in the local decision-making process.

Since the sponsors of major transportation projects are often local jurisdictions county CMAs, it is critical that the public participate in decisions made at the local level. MTC also works with the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to coordinate public involvement activities.

Listening and Responding to the Public

MTC pays close attention to the views of the public. MTC is committed to responding to every letter, fax and email sent by members of the public. A centralized database of citizen participants that is also "flagged" by issue interest also allows MTC to send targeted mailings to update citizens on the specific issues they are interested in, including information on how public meetings/participation have contributed to its key decisions and actions.

In addition to the public information and involvement efforts listed above, MTC complies with all other public notification requirements of the state's Ralph M. Brown Act, the California Public Records Act, the California Environmental Quality Act, as well as the mandates of the federal Transportation Act for the Twenty-First Century (TEA-21), the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other applicable state and federal laws.

MTC's public involvement processes are periodically reviewed in terms of their effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open access to all. This is demonstrated by the media's responsiveness and interest in MTC issues as they arise, the public information staff's effective relationships with transportation beat reporters, usage of MTC's user-friendly and consumer-oriented web site containing many topics useful to a range of readers. Additional effectiveness is secured by soliciting comments from the public via email, as well as a periodic survey of readers of MTC's monthly newsletter to gauge readers' reactions to the content and graphic presentation of the newsletter. As part of any outreach meeting, citizen attendees are surveyed as to their opinion of the effectiveness of the meeting.

Proposed community outreach/public information plans are reviewed with MTC *citizen* advisory committees. Finally input is received via a tear-out reply card at the back of the *Citizens' Guide to MTC*. The form asks readers for "comments and suggestions for improving MTC's public involvement activities."

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